

**STRATEGY
RESEARCH
PROJECT**

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**A STRATEGIC EXAMINATION OF THE 1876 YELLOWSTONE
CAMPAIGN: ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR MODERN DAY
PEACE ENFORCEMENT OPERATIONS**

BY

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ABSTRACT

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The Purpose of this paper is to conduct a critical analysis of the post Civil War Army's conduct of the Peacekeeping Operations conducted in the Trans-Mississippi West against the Native American tribes of the Great Plains. I will specifically examine United States Indian Policy of the time, and I will analyze the Army's ability to support the Government's strategic "Ends" given the "Ways" and "Means" available. I will focus this analysis on the 1876 Yellowstone Campaign, conducted with the operational objective of forcing "Hostile" bands of Sioux, Cheyenne and Arapaho Indians back onto their respective Reservations; and the strategic objective of creating a stable environment in the northern plains to facilitate both private and commercial development. In the course of the analysis, I will present recommendations for improvement and or application for today's ongoing and future Peacekeeping Operations.

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PREFACE

As a young man, I had always been interested in the Frontier Army of the great American West. At an early age I was given a book entitled *Indian Fights and Fighters*, authored by Cyrus Townsend Brady and read the stories and exploits of those brave soldiers with interest and excitement. I believe it was this book and the guiding hand of both my parents that eventually lead me to this honorable profession of service to a great nation. Thank you Mom and Dad for that first book which provided me with the first spark of passion to join the United States Army. Since those early childhood days, the history of our Frontier Army has continued to interest me. So as I began to conduct the research for this paper and look at the strategic aspects of the Yellowstone Campaign I again turned to that old book that was given to me over thirty years ago. It has served me well.

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A Strategic Examination of the 1876 Yellowstone Campaign: Its Implications for Modern Day Peace Enforcement Operations

"I am a red man. If the Great Spirit had desired me to be a white man, he would have made me so in the first place. Now we are poor but we are free. No white man controls our footsteps. If we must die we die defending our right"

- Sitting Bull, Hunkpapa Sioux

"If I were an Indian, I would greatly prefer to cast my lot among those people who adhered to the free open plains rather than to submit to the confined limits of the reservation"

- LTC George Armstrong Custer

PURPOSE

The Purpose of this paper is to conduct a critical analysis of the post Civil War Army's conduct of the Peace Enforcement Operations in the Trans-Mississippi West against the Native American tribes of the Great Plains. Much has been written of the fate of the Yellowstone Campaign and the officers and soldiers of the 7th Cavalry who took part in it. Historical scholars have preferred spending much of their research and writings on the tactical and operational facts that many say caused the destruction of Lieutenant Colonel George Custer's command and the defeat of Brigadier General George Crook. However, I believe the 1876 Campaign against the Sioux was jeopardized at the strategic level before a single soldier put spur to horse in pursuit of the Indians. This paper will focus on those strategic level factors that I believe led to the disaster. Based on this analysis we will see that the Army's ability to support the government's policy "Ends" were severely crippled given the "Ways" and "Means" available at that time in history. This critical analysis will provide a chronology of government policy and actions, and a strategic overview of the period. I will specifically examine United States' strategic Indian policy of the time. I will also discuss other areas that had a significant impact on the government's campaign objectives such as cultural differences, players with an impact on the campaign, Army doctrine, tactics, training, equipment and planning of the expedition.

Although I will discuss general concepts and policies of the era as they relate, this analysis will focus on the Army's 1876 Yellowstone Campaign, conducted with the operational

objective of forcing the "Hostile" bands of Sioux, Cheyenne and Arapaho Indians back onto their respective reservations and the strategic objective of creating a stable environment in the northern plains to facilitate both private and commercial development. In the course of this analysis, I will present recommendations for improvement and or application for today's ongoing and future Peace Enforcement and Peacekeeping Operations.

PEACEKEEPING AND PEACE ENFORCING, LOOKING BACK TO LOOK FORWARD

For over 250 years America's Army has proudly and continuously, "Provided for the general defense, promoted the general Welfare, and secured the blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity."¹ Over this extended period of time our country has truly been blessed with relative stability and an unmatched freedom which has made the United States the preeminent "Superpower" in the world today. Throughout those 250 plus years, that freedom and internal stability were insured to all of us as citizens at a very heavy cost in both human loss of life as well as expended natural resources in the conduct of so called "Hot Wars" around the world. At the close of World War II the single threat to the valued American pursuits of freedom, liberty and prosperity was the aggressive Soviet Union and its allies in the Warsaw Pact. For just over 40 years, the United States and the Army had a very straightforward policy and mission: to contain and if so called upon to defeat the Soviets in a land war in Central Europe. Both government policy and Army doctrine had totally focused on this primary threat. The "Ends" were clear, contain the Soviets and defeat them on the ground, air and sea if necessary. The "Ways" were clear: "Air Land Battle doctrine." Of course the "Means" were readily available: a large well-trained, offense oriented force, properly resourced with the men, material and infrastructure to achieve success.

Ten years after the Cold War victory our nation and our Army continue to promote and defend those timeless values spelled out in the preamble of our nation's Constitution. Although the Soviet threat is gone it is replaced by countless other challenges to both our nation's and our Allies' stability. The Bipolar World we became so accustomed to, and which forced relative stability, has disappeared and in its place, the rise of "Nationalism" and the appearance of failed states have caused a rash of regional unrest and conflict over the past ten years. This development in unrest around the world has led the United States and many other nations to expand deployments of soldiers, airmen and naval assets to those regions in support of peace-keeping efforts. In fact, during the Cold War, the United States deployed troops overseas for combat and or Peacekeeping Operations fifteen times. However, since 1990, the United States has deployed troops to over thirty-five various combat and or Peace Enforcement Operations.

Based on the new reality of an unstable world and an ever increasing need for a credible force to intervene unilaterally or as a part of a United Nations mandated Peacekeeping force, it is critical and essential that the United States Army reflect back on its long history. An institution must continually seek to improve and learn, in order that it remain healthy and continue to move forward toward success.

As one goes back in the annals of Army history, it is important to note that the majority of operations executed by the United States Army have in fact been in the realm of what today would be considered, Peace Enforcement Operations:

“The Application of military force or threat of its use, normally pursuant to International authorization, to compel compliance with resolutions or sanctions designed to maintain or restore peace and order.”²

And to a lesser extent, Peacekeeping Operations:

“Military operations undertaken with the consent of all major parties to a dispute, designed to monitor and facilitate implementation of an agreement (cease fire, truce, or other such agreement) and support diplomatic efforts to reach a long-term political settlement.”³

The period in our Army's history from 1865 to 1877 is critically important to understand. The Peace Enforcement Operations conducted against Native Americans then, and those being conducted by our Army today around the world, have many parallels. Our operations then, as now, occurred after the Army had successfully won a very intense conflict and was forced to draw down its force structure. The Congress at the time was very interested as now, in domestic issues and policies and spent diminishing time and money on defense policy and procurement. The Army then, as now, had an ever increasing, multiple role as Peacemaker and enforcer, warfighter and nation builder. Did that government and Army of the post-Civil War era have the proper combination and balance of clearly defined ends, ways and means necessary to achieve strategic success? Do we have the proper strategic balance of ends, ways and means today? Can we as a modern Army learn from the lessons of the past and apply them for future success? To answer these questions we will begin with a look back in time to the pre and post-Civil War Army, review the chronology of policy and events that led to the ultimate failure of the Army's Peace Enforcement Operation, the Yellowstone Campaign of 1876-77.

CHRONOLOGY OF U.S. INDIAN POLICY AND EVENTS LEADING TO THE LITTLE BIG HORN

1825: "Secretary of War John C. Calhoun recommends that the "desert" area of the southern plains be set aside as a permanent Indian country and that Eastern Indians be moved there to find a permanent home."⁴

1830: "Congress authorizes the President to exchange land beyond the Mississippi for lands held by the Indian tribes in the states and territories."⁵ President Andrew Jackson, having no sympathy for the native population begins the fateful policy to remove the Indians from their rightful homes and dislocate them to a location of little value to the white population of the time. A permanent Indian Territory is established in Oklahoma to facilitate the removal and dislocation policy.

1834: The Indian Rights Act of 1834 solidifies a permanent Indian Territory. The act forbids trespass of whites into the territory and provided both government sponsored aid and formal education to the Indian population located there.

1849: The Office of Indian Affairs is transferred from the War Department to the newly established Department of the Interior. Westerners far less sympathetic to the Native American would wield the power in this department for years to come. The Interior Department would have a great impact on shaping future strategic Indian policy.

1850: The concept of a permanent Indian Territory begins to "rapidly erode." In the aftermath of the Mexican War the great expansion of United States territories in the west open the way to increased migration to Texas, New Mexico, Arizona and California. The Gold Rush in California and new farmlands in Oregon seemed to seal the eventual fate of the Indian Territory. White settlers emigrated across the "Great American Desert" by the thousands and began to establish permanent roads, homestead farms, mines, and ranches. This encroachment, though only slight prior to the Civil War, was a telltale sign of what was to follow. The fate of the Indian Territory west of the Mississippi was sealed as these new Americans saw new opportunity in the great American West.

1860-1865: The Civil War years brought both movement west and organized Army operations in the West to a standstill. However, frustration and unrest with the dismal conditions on the Santee Sioux Reservation in Minnesota in 1862 spiraled into a bloody uprising, which led to the killing of hundreds of white men, woman and children. The Santee were ultimately defeated and forced back to their reservation by a force of Minnesota and Wisconsin Volunteers. Although a number of Santee would migrate from their reservation to the hostile camps of their western cousins, the Teton Sioux, this operation was one of the Army's first

successful Peace Enforcement Operations. The Indians were not the only ones to instigate bloodshed however. In 1864, a large force of Colorado Volunteer Cavalry attacked the Southern Cheyenne camp of Chief Black Kettle on Sand Creek in eastern Colorado. They indiscriminately killed men, women and children, and performed atrocities that, by today's standard, would equate to those performed in the Balkans. Neither whites nor Indians would forget these two bitter and bloody events. The memory of these events would shape future cultural mistrust, antagonism and strategic Indian policy for the next 35 years.

1866: With the end of the Civil War Americans and an ever-increasing wave of settlers looked to the Trans-Mississippi West to pursue or find the American dream of freedom and new opportunity. New riches could be found in the gold fields of southwest Montana if one was willing to take the risk. In response to the increased migration westward along the Bozeman Trail to the gold fields, the United States Government sent a Peace Commission to Fort Laramie to establish peace terms with the Sioux and Northern Cheyenne Indians of the northern plains. Even as peace terms were being negotiated, the United States government sent troops to establish several forts along the Bozeman Trails. The perceptive Oglala Sioux War Chief, Red Cloud, protested the government's encroaching. "The Great Father sends us presents and wants us to sell him this road," he protested in the Peace Council, "but the white chief goes with soldiers to steal the road before Indians say yes or no."⁶ This misstep by Government policy makers in Washington caused the Indians to break off negotiations and led to what was to be known as "Red Cloud's War."

1866-1868: With the establishment of Forts Phil Kearney and C. F. Smith by Colonel Henry B. Carrington and his 18th Infantry Regiment, Chief Red Cloud and his warriors effectively laid siege to the upper Bozeman trail for two years. The government's initial objective of providing protection for migrating miners and travelers along the trail completely collapsed. After the Indians effectively shut down travel on the trail, while constantly harassing work details from the forts and completely destroying Captain W.J. Fetterman's eighty-man force, the government conceded defeat. The forts along the Bozeman trail were abandoned and promptly burned by the Sioux. The government's strong-arm policy was a dismal failure and only raised Indian resentment and mistrust concerning any future diplomacy. Nevertheless, in 1868, Red Cloud signed a peace treaty with the government after the Bozeman Trail and the protective forts were abandoned. This treaty stated that the Powder River country was to become "Unceded Territory" of the Sioux Nation and closed to all whites. However, the Indians would reign supreme for only ten more years in the Powder River region of Wyoming and Montana.

1867-1868: “A government sanctioned Peace Commission spent the summer of 1867 and 1868 on the plains attempting to persuade the Indians to retreat onto reservations, whose boundaries would open much of the central plains allowing for white settlement and railroads. This Peace Commission enjoyed considerable success in securing treaty agreements.”⁷

1869: The government’s new policy of forcing Indian nations onto “limited reservations” implied a new strategy for the severely understrength Army. They would no longer take a passive role of merely patrolling the main settlers’ routes and protecting railroad work crews. This new policy “implied that the Army would be mainly on the offensive, to force the Indians into their respective reservations, and punish them if they did not go promptly or if they wandered astray.”⁸

1874: With the country in an economic recession there was constant pressure placed on the government to open up treaty secured Indian lands for development, mining and homesteading. This encroachment was increased with new rumors of gold found in the Black Hills of western South Dakota. As the United States was still on the gold standard and in the midst of economic turmoil with a short money supply, the news of potential gold in the Black Hills was seen as a way out of the country’s deep recession. President Grant authorized the Army to conduct an “expedition” into the Black Hills, the Sioux nation’s sacred hunting grounds. The objective was to “investigate the many gold claims coming from the region and determine a suitable location to build a new fort in this strategic area that could provide protection for the coming Northern Pacific railroad.”⁹ With Lieutenant Colonel George Armstrong Custer at the lead, the Black Hills Expedition indeed found the gold claims to be true. Once the news of this new bonanza was out, the white prospectors came in droves to seek fortunes. The Army did not have the assets to keep white trespassers out. The Indians vehemently protested. The government, in return, made an effort to purchase the Black Hills outright. The Sioux refused and a frustrated President Grant ordered all Indians onto their respective reservations. Both greed and government indifference became the final deathblow to Grant’s peace policy on the Northern Plains.

1875: As the Sioux and Cheyenne defied the government’s order to return to their respective reservations, the Government became increasingly impatient. “In November 1875, the President called a meeting at the White House that included Secretary of War William W. Belknap, Commissioner of Indian Affairs E. P. Smith, and Generals Phillip H. Sheridan and George C. Crook.”¹⁰ Two key, fateful decisions were made. It was decided that all troops would be withdrawn from the Black Hills, effectively opening the region to prospectors. The second decision was to effectively wage war on the Sioux by forcing them from their rightful “Unceded

Territories" in the Powder River country of Wyoming and Montana and onto reservations in the Dakota Territory. These two strategic decisions led directly to the failed peace policy and the subsequent 1876 Yellowstone Campaign.

1876: On 6 November 1875, "in response to Interior Secretary Zachariah Chandler's request, Commissioner of Indians Affairs Smith instructed the Sioux agents to send runners out to all the tribes in the Unceded Territory. They must return to their reservations by 31 January 1876, otherwise they would be certified as "Hostile" and the Army would come after them."¹¹ Even if the Indians had been able to move in the dead of winter, the resentment of the Sioux was beyond repair. The Indians did not come in to the reservation and orders were given to the Army to plan and execute a winter campaign. Due to extreme weather and logistical delays, limited actions were taken in the winter of 1876 with little success. As warm weather approached, the Army's plans came together. Sheridan planned for three separate columns to converge in the Powder River country to force the defiant Sioux back to their reservations in the Dakota Territory. The Sioux mustered their strength in the summer of 1876 and a confederation of Indians such as had not been seen in the history of the United States would make both the government and Army pay for a failed strategic policy.

STRATEGIC BACKGROUND, THE ENDS WAYS AND MEANS

Great cultural conflicts and clashes have occurred time and again throughout history and like those before it, the clash of cultures between whites and Native Americans evolved over an extended period of time. The chronology of our government policies and strategic objectives clearly demonstrates this fact. Moreover, there is a clear demarcation line between the government's Indian policies prior to the Civil War and those policies adopted after that great conflict.

"Until the time of the Civil War, the conscious purpose of the United States Government in its relations with the Indian nations was not to eliminate them, but to move them out of territory desirable to the white man and into lands where the white man was not yet ready to venture, or where it was assumed he would never settle."¹² The Indian Removal Act signed into law in May of 1830 clearly spelled out the government's ultimate ends, ways and means of dealing with native populations during this period. Native populations were moved out of their historical territories. In exchange for land east of the Mississippi, native tribes such as the Cherokee and Choctaw were given large tracts of land to settle on in the designated "Indian Territory" in present day Oklahoma. According to the Act, the lands given to these tribes were, "forever secure and guaranteed to them, and their heirs and successors, and that the country so

exchanged with them and if they prefer it, that the United States will cause a patent or grant to be made for them for the same.”¹³

Thus, the government began its policy of Indian removal. The objective and methods of this new policy were clear and supported by the United States Army as a means to facilitate the beleaguered tribes on their long and desperate journey from historic homelands to strange new lands west of the Mississippi. Tribes in the Trans-Mississippi West, specifically the Sioux and Cheyenne, were left in relative peace. The white settlers of the time were more interested in navigating through the semi-arid Great American Desert, as it was called, on the way to gold fields of California or the rich farmland of Oregon’s Willamette Valley. However, the first seeds of discontent were being sewn with the sporadic contact both white emigrants and Indians had with each other; the mistrust developed in this pre-Civil War period would manifest itself with tragic consequences throughout the course of the war.

During the Civil War, the already small regular Army was ordered out of the western territories and sent back to take part in the more significant battles in the east. However, there remained a need in portions of the west for continued military presence. Territories such as Colorado went on to raise their own cavalry regiments to keep the “peace” in the absence of a regular force. Men of suspect character and beliefs assumed positions of leadership in these regiments and had profound impact on both the war in the east and west. On the morning of 28 December 1864, the regimental commander of the 2nd Colorado Volunteer Cavalry named John M. Chivington, an extremist Indian hater, made a lasting impact that would be remembered by the plains Indians for years to come. On that cold sunny morning, with a force of over 700 men recruited from Denver saloons and local mining communities, he attacked a peaceful Indian village in eastern Colorado at Sand Creek. The band of Cheyenne and Arapaho under the leadership of Black Kettle had surrendered to the commander of Fort Lyon and had encamped on Sand Creek as ordered two months prior. As the attack began Chivington delivered his famous battle cry, “kill them all big and small, nits make lice.”¹⁴ When the slaughter was over 123 Indian men, women and children were dead in the snow.

This harsh lesson was not lost on the Indians of the high plains, “the usually fragmented and often contentious small bands of Lakota, Cheyenne and Arapaho soon learned to cooperate”¹⁵ for their very survival and formed a strong confederation that would affect the Yellowstone Campaign twelve years later. “Chivington’s blunderous attack also stirred pro-Indian sentiment back East, where worries of Indians wars and their effect on the occupation of the South as well as proceeding with a Trans-Continental Railroad began to push policy makers,”¹⁶ toward a more permanent solution to the Indian challenges in the west.

After the Civil War, the Army assumed it would again take up duties patrolling the Indian territories in the west, however, the government was anxious to begin the healing process between the North and South. The primary policy objective for the United States was to get on with the reconstruction and readmittance of the eleven southern states. The much-scaled down Army of 50,000 men was assigned to oversee and facilitate the reconstruction effort. In fact, "for twelve years a considerable number of regular troops protected unpopular civil governments, ensured federal authority and enforced voting regulations in the defeated Confederate States. In 1867 these duties involved forty percent of the Army, as late as 1876, 15 percent of the entire Army was still billeted in the South."¹⁷

The demands of overseeing reconstruction were not the only challenges the Army had to contend with during this period, "policing social unrest, and manning coastal fortifications also drew troops away from the inland frontiers. In addition, confused administration and chains of command only further weakened the military's efforts to execute multiple missions."¹⁸ Moreover, the Congress, with many Southern Democrats in powerful positions, continually pushed for smaller military budgets. The combination of a small, under resourced Army assigned to execute multiple competing missions over a vast area of the United States would have severe consequences.

The soldiers sent to the western plains to enforce peace among the Indian tribes did not have the benefit of a well-balanced strategic policy. "In practice strategic policy regarding the Indians was disjointed. Cabinet level meetings on Indian affairs were the exception throughout the period. Correspondence among senior Army officers, the War Department and Congress regarding Indian policy was irregular and undertaken largely in response to individual problems or spurts of feverish activity.... Discussions of strategic military policy against Indians simply did not occur on a routine basis."¹⁹

Although the United States government and many an Indian sympathizer group back east verbally supported the reservation policy developed through years of negotiation with the tribes, actual support in the form of proper resourcing and effective oversight never materialized. Corruption throughout the Indian Bureau specifically at the agency level was rampant. Indian Agents slighted the tribes of their rations and sold the balance for profit. The Congress was always slow to appropriate the needed funding to sustain even the most basic tribal needs such as food, clothing and the necessary implements to allow the tribes to support themselves through farming. "Objective observers recognized that the government's Indian policy was fostering neither peace along the frontier nor the civilization of the Indians."²⁰ Sherman warned Congress, "If these challenges persist we will have trouble with these Indians, the

appropriations always fall short and the Army is in no condition to help.”²¹ With their land taken, their economic livelihood, the Buffalo, near extinction and a neglectful government unwilling to keep its end of a treaty, the Sioux and Cheyenne grew more resentful and militant. This unrest eventually lead to an exodus of thousands of “peaceful Indians” off the reservation and into the hostile camps of Crazy Horse and Sitting Bull in the summer of 1876.

Despite the many challenges facing the Army, the government was determined to achieve very specific objectives or “Ends.” The Army would force the Indians back to their respective reservations and stabilize the region for future white encroachment and development. Generals Grant, Sherman and Sheridan had seen the terrible effectiveness of waging “Total War” on the South during the Civil War. In the end, the Army reverted to this same devastating approach. “General Grant, the Commanding General of the Army, said in 1868 that the emigrants and railroads would be protected even if the extermination of every Indian tribe was necessary to secure such a result.”²² Despite the clear end results desired, the plan to achieve those desired strategic objectives was never clearly developed or well coordinated by the government and the military. The Yellowstone Campaign of 1876 is a classic representation of the government’s unbalanced strategic policy with regards to the disposition of the Indians on the northern plains during this period.

THE YELLOWSTONE CAMPAIGN, AN OVERVIEW

The initial concept of the Yellowstone Campaign began in the fall of 1875. With the discovery of mineral wealth in the Black Hills region and pressure to open it up to development, the government began an effort to either purchase or take the Black Hills from the Sioux Nation. The government knew that many Sioux and Cheyenne chose to spend their summers roaming and hunting in the unceded territory of eastern Montana outside the designated Sioux reservation boundary. Although outside the Reservation, this land was legally owned by the Sioux. However, in December of 1875, with the Sioux refusing to negotiate the sale of the hills, the government made the decision to force all Sioux onto the Reservation in the Dakota Territory or be treated as hostiles. The conditions necessary to breach the 1868 peace treaty with the Sioux guaranteeing the “Great Sioux Reservation” for all time were set in place. The government, knowing that the Sioux were less mobile in the winter months gave them only a month to accomplish the mandated move back to the reservation. Naturally, the government mandate was ignored. On 31 January 1876, those bands roaming in the unceded territory under Sitting Bull and Crazy Horse became the focus of the government’s effort to subdue the

hostiles and force them onto the reservation and in addition, take the Black Hills as the spoils of war.

On 1 February 1876, General Sheridan sent telegrams to both Brigadier Generals George Crook and Alfred Terry to provide them with initial guidance and permission to begin the planning for a winter campaign against the hostile Sioux. The end-state was clear: find and remove the Indians from the Unceded Territory and escort them by the means necessary back to the Sioux Reservation.

Sheridan had achieved success closing with and subduing hostile Indians by executing winter campaigns in the past. His plan was to launch three strong columns into the Unceded Territory against the hostile bands and overwhelm them in their winter camps. Crook was to lead one column of 1200 men north from Fort Fetterman, Terry, with Custer's 7th Cavalry, would push west from Fort Abraham Lincoln, while Colonel John Gibbon with 450 men would advance east from Fort Ellis in central Montana. Due to heavy snows and initial logistical challenges, neither Terry nor Gibbon were able to launch their columns until the late spring. However, Crook marched out of Fort Fetterman in early March on what would be his initial drive against the Sioux. On 17 and 18 March, a portion of Crook's command under Colonel Joseph J. Reynolds found and attacked a large Sioux village on the Powder River in southeastern Montana. Although surprise was achieved in the initial attack, The Indians rallied and fought the cavalry forces from the heights above the river inflicting heavy casualties. Reynolds ordered the village and all food and clothing stores burned and retreated from the valley with the large pony herd. Poor planning and leadership decisions enabled the Indians to steal back the pony herd the next day and Reynolds' initial fight was over. Although he had inflicted a serious loss on the Indian's food supplies and shelters, he had failed to capture them and their pony herd that gave them mobility. Crook, furious with Reynolds' actions in this engagement, was forced to return to Fort Fetterman and refit his force for a summer campaign.

With this initial setback in mind, the three columns continued preparations for a renewed effort. Gibbon's column was able to move out in late March with the mission to secure the north bank of the Yellowstone River and to block any attempt by the Indians to cross the river and escape toward Canada. Terry's column left Fort Lincoln on 17 May with 925 men. Their mission was to push any Indians west in the direction of the Big Horn River. Crook, for the second time moved his column out from Fort Fetterman on 29 May. His mission was to push the Indians north toward the Yellowstone River. With his three columns in the field Sheridan felt assured that his plan to push the Indians into any one of the independently moving columns would succeed as it had so well in his Red River Texas Campaign in 1874, (Figure 1).

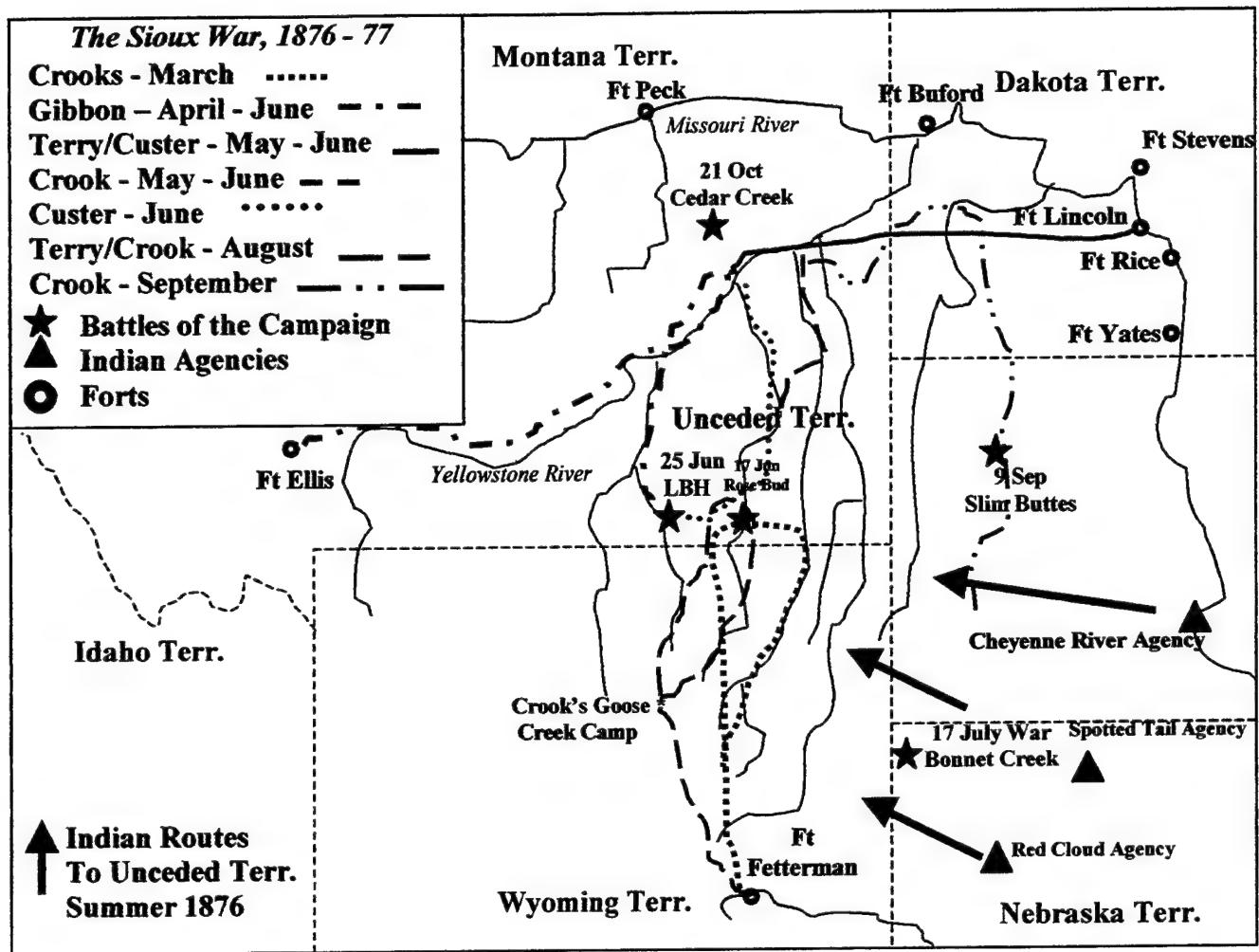


Figure 1. Operational Map of the 1876 Yellowstone Campaign

By early June Crook had established his supply base at Goose Creek near present day Sheridan Wyoming, while Gibbon and Terry had done the same on the north bank of the Yellowstone River. The heightened tension between the government and hostile Indians combined with the deplorable living conditions on the reservations spurred a large migration of Agency Indians to the hostile camps in the spring and early summer of 1876. By mid-June, it is estimated that the normal population of 400 to 800 warriors had grown to between 1500 to 3000 warriors in the Unceded Territory. Unlike past years the bands began to assemble and move together and would eventually stand and fight together with an unprecedented sense of purpose. Although Sheridan, Crook and the Indian Agents knew of this mass migration in late

May, no effort was made to inform Terry, Custer or Gibbon of this crucial piece of intelligence regarding enemy strength in the Unceded Territory.

Crook left his supply base and moved north onto the Rosebud River and on 17 June was attacked by a large force of Sioux and Cheyenne under the direction of Crazy Horse. On this day, the Indians broke all their previous fighting paradigms. They fought in a mutually supporting, disciplined manner with mass formations and with a unity of effort never witnessed in previous battles. Although the overwhelming force of Indians initially surprised Crook and his large force, he rallied his troops and managed to fight the attackers to a standstill and in the late afternoon the outflanked Indians retired from the field. Crook made the most fateful operational decision of the campaign at this point. Believing he was up against a numerically superior force and with ten soldiers killed, many wounded and low on ammunition, he retreated back to his supply base on Goose Creek. Crook, concerned about his strength, sent for reinforcements and took his large force out of the campaign for a full month. Moreover, Crook made no effort to provide Terry's column with crucial information regarding his disposition or that of the Indians; this decision would have grave consequences for Custer and his troops one week later.

As Crook sat at Goose Creek out of the fight, Terry gave orders to Custer to move his force up the Rosebud Creek and find the large Indian trail known to be in the area. After finding this trail, he was to conduct a reconnaissance in force pushing west-southwest to insure the Indians did not escape south or west into the Big Horn Mountains. However, when Custer crossed the large Indian trail he chose to pursue the Indians. On 25 June, sensing he had lost the element of surprise and with imperfect knowledge of the enemy's exact location and strength, Custer made the fateful decision to attack the Sioux in the valley of the Little Big Horn. On 27 June Brigadier General Terry established contact with survivors of Custer's command and began the task of burying the dead and evacuating the wounded back to Fort Lincoln.

Both Terry and Crook would continue the pursuit of the Sioux late into the summer and fall of 1876 but would have little success. On 5 September 1876 Terry and his column left the campaign and began their return march to Fort Lincoln. Crook remained on the trail of the hostile bands and fought a few minor engagements. However, Sitting Bull and his band escaped into Canada while Crazy Horse and his band continued to elude the Army until the following year. The largest Indian campaign ever undertaken had ended in failure yet spelled the beginning of the end for the Sioux and other Indians of the high plains. A renewed and overwhelming effort by the Army during the winter of 1877 and increased support from Congress in the face of the Custer disaster sealed the Indians' fate.

PEOPLE AND PLAYERS OF THE YELLOWSTONE CAMPAIGN

The most important variable in any historical analysis must be that of the human dimension. We cannot understand the greatness of civilizations such as Rome or Greece and their rise to power and fall from grace without analyzing their leaders. So it is crucial that we analyze the United States government and its Army of 1876 to further understand the strategic imbalance that existed during this period and how individual players affected that imbalance. The Yellowstone Campaign was shaped by the many personalities and leadership styles of men such as Sheridan, Crook, Terry and Custer. Moreover, institutions such as Congress and the American public also played a major role in the strategic outcome of this campaign. This section will analyze the noted leaders and major players involved in the 1876 Campaign focusing on their background, experience, and the key decisions they made that had an impact on both the strategic and operational outcomes of the campaign.

Ulysses S. Grant is perhaps the most important general in our country's short military history. Although a failure in many private ventures, Grant is widely held as the father of the "American Way of War" or "Total Warfare." His sole object in the Civil War was to close with the Confederate Army and annihilate it through constant and persistent offensive operations. In 1876 President Grant along with his many subordinate commanders in the Army, such as Sherman, Sheridan, and Crook would carry this same offensive spirit with them as they prosecuted operations against the Sioux in 1876.

Early in Grant's Presidency, he made major peace overtures to the Sioux, with the desire to bring calm and stability to the northern plains. However, in 1875 an economic downturn, the desire to push the Northern Pacific Railroad forward and the mineral wealth found in the Black Hills placed great pressure on President Grant to pursue offensive actions against the Sioux. "To reap full advantage a war would need to be directed not against the docile agency Sioux, but against those hostile roammers in the Unceded Territory. A punishing terrifying campaign against these wild bands would certainly subdue them and at the same time so intimidate their agency relatives that a legal three-fourths might panic and sign over their rights to the Black Hills. And failing that, the nation could seize the Black Hills as the spoils of war without legal hindrance."²³

Although no real legal grounds existed for the President to take such action against the Sioux, his fateful decision to pursue offensive operations against them would develop into the Yellowstone Campaign of 1876 and have a far-reaching strategic impact for both the Indians and the Army. For the Sioux, it would spell the beginning of the end of their culture and nomadic way of life. For the Army, the crushing defeat at the Little Big Horn would spur both the

Congress and American public into action to restore the Army's strength and resource it appropriately to accomplish its mission to enforce peace with the plains tribes.

The United States Congress had perhaps the greatest strategic impact on the Army's ability to pursue the President's offensive policy against the Sioux. After the end of the Civil War the Army's warfighting role and missions increased to include oversight of the reconstruction effort in the south and the conduct of Peace Enforcement Operations in the West. Despite these expanded roles the Congress found little need to support a large standing Army and beginning in 1869 a series of deep cuts were imposed on the institution. "The Army appropriations act of March 3, 1869, cut the number of infantry regiments from forty-five to twenty-five. The act reduced the Army from 54,000 men to an end strength of 37,313."²⁴ With Southern Democrats gaining a power base in the House of Representatives in 1875, the Army again came under a vigorous attack. "For four years beginning in 1875, House Democrats went after the Army with a vengeance. Only by the most diligent efforts did the Republican-controlled Senate save the Army from total emasculation."²⁵

This long-term congressional neglect affected every aspect of the Army and its ability to enforce the government's strategic policy of Peace Enforcement throughout the west. Scaled back funding decreased the Army's ability to train effectively to even a mediocre standard. Decreased manning left the Army with a hollow force to execute its ever-increasing mission requirements. "The true measure of the cuts was manifested at the company level. With 430 companies, the Army had to man some two hundred posts, spread over the entire west and conduct duties in support of southern reconstruction. As cuts continued, the number of baseline tactical units, the company and troop did not decrease, only the manpower was reduced. Accordingly, with each reduction, the company shrank in number and fighting efficiency. Actual enlisted strength of a 120-man cavalry troop averaged 58 men and Infantry companies averaged 41 men."²⁶

In addition to under-resourcing the Army, Congress consistently under-appropriated funds to properly support the government's treaty obligations to the Sioux and Cheyenne living on reservations in the Dakota Territory and Nebraska. Many of these disenfranchised Indians, fed up with starvation and lacking the basic necessities to survive, chose to leave the reservation. During the summer of 1876 thousands would flee the reservation and join the free roaming bands of Crazy Horse and Sitting Bull, all ready to fight for their very survival.

With these facts as a backdrop Generals Sheridan, Terry and Crook would plan and execute their campaign into hostile Sioux territory in the summer of 1876. Congressional indifference to both the Army's needs and to the plight of the Reservation Indians had a major

impact on the will of the Indians to resist and on the Army's means to prosecute the campaign to a successful conclusion. This long-term congressional neglect would only be reversed with the news of Custer's terrible defeat that summer.

The Officer Corps in 1876 generally consisted of a core of professionals trained at West Point. Although small in size, the corps was wise in the prosecution of conventional warfare after four long years of Civil War. However, these same professionals, with preconceived notions of what war was were woefully ill-trained and unprepared to fight a protracted guerilla war on the open plains against an elusive foe who rarely stood and fought a set piece battle.

Neither Army doctrine nor the West Point curriculum of the period, dealt with fighting against an irregular force. Officer education dealt with general leadership development and basic engineering skills. "The little strategic instruction that was offered tended to reinforce practical experience and youthful republican aggressiveness and applied largely to traditional European-style warfare. In fact, in 1870 Sir Edward Bruce Hamley's text, Operations of War, which stressed classic Napoleonic warfare and strategy, was adopted as the West Point text book on warfighting."²⁷

In addition to the lack of doctrine and training to support the Officer Corps in this new style of warfare, "numerous other problems beset the Army's Officer Corps after 1865. Overcaution and age prevented some officers from successfully combating elusive Indians. Abrasive personalities, petty animosities and personal ambition all precluded proper cooperation even at the department level. Because of these facts, cordial support among commanders in the field was frequently impossible to achieve."²⁸ In fact, the two officers leading the main and supporting efforts of the Yellowstone Campaign did not get along. It is well documented that Brigadier General George Crook held a low opinion of Brigadier General Alfred Terry. As a result, little effort was made by Crook to coordinate or communicate the disposition of his column's actions with that of Terry's until well after the Custer disaster. Crook's defeat on the Rosebud a week prior to the Little Big Horn battle is a case in point. Crook pulled back to his base camp at Goose Creek and made no attempt to communicate with Terry's command on his disposition or that of the large Indian forces he had encountered in the field at the time. Not only had his withdrawal forfeited the initiative in the campaign undermining the operational design, but his lack of coordinated effort with Terry's column set the stage for Custer's defeat a week later. One could assume that had Terry and Crook coordinated their respective movements and efforts against the Sioux the results would have been much different.

General Sheridan, the commander of the Military Division of the Missouri, had a significant impact on the outcome of the campaign at the operational level. Sheridan's official

order to General Crook set the tone early on for lack of any unity of command or coordinated effort during the campaign. The following is Sheridan's initial orders to Crook to launch his part of the campaign:

Headquarters Military Division of the Missouri

Chicago, Illinois, February 8, 1876

***Respectfully forwarded to Brig. General Crook, Commanding Department of the
Platte, inviting attention to the requests from the Secretary of the Interior and the
commission of Indian Affairs, and the orders from the Secretary of War, and the General
of the Army, directed that hostilities be commenced against certain Sioux Indians.***

***You are therefore ordered to take such steps with the forces under your command
as will carry out the wishes and orders above alluded to.***

***The lines and character of the operations of General Terry will be communicated to
you as a means of information as soon as they are definitely determined upon.***

***All department lines will be disregarded by the troops until the object requested by
the Secretary of the Interior is attained.***

***I am of the belief that the operations under your directions and those under
General Terry should be made without concert, but if you and he can come to any
understanding about concerted movements, there will be no objection from me.***

P.H. Sheridan

LT General

Commanding²⁹

It is the final paragraph of this order that sets the tone of non-cooperation during the execution of this entire campaign, as Sheridan does not specify a joint planning effort between Crook and Terry. The "Way" or plan to achieve the government's "End" was corrupted from the beginning. Moreover, Sheridan's failure to establish an overall commander and also pass along critical operational intelligence to his commanders in the field concerning the massive number of Indians leaving the reservation to join the hostiles contributed to the campaign's ultimate failure.

During the period leading up to the Yellowstone campaign the relationship between General Sheridan and Crook had become quite strained due to Crook's jealousy of Sheridan's success after the Civil War. "The Sheridan-Crook alliance for this campaign was doomed from the beginning, as it brought together two stubborn, fiercely independent men. Crook routinely

failed to keep superiors informed of his actions in the field. Sheridan expected his subordinates to remain in close contact with him.³⁰ Although Crook would send for reinforcements after his initial setback at the Rosebud 17 June, he failed to inform Sheridan of his situation and remained out of contact for a month waiting to be reinforced. While Crook and over a thousand men sat idle, Terry and the balance of his command a mere forty-five miles north, hastily buried 263 soldiers of the 7th Cavalry on the hills above the Little Big Horn River.

Brigadier General Alfred Terry was a widely respected commander and Sheridan held him in high esteem. Terry had been an aggressive and successful commander during the Civil War and received much notoriety for his capture of Fort Fisher during the war. However, since the war, Terry had had no campaign experience and virtually no direct Indian fighting experience.

On 8 February, Sheridan sent Terry notification to commence operations against the hostile Sioux in his Department of the Dakotas. It was estimated at the time that between 400-800 hostiles were roaming in the Unceded Territory in eastern Montana. Terry was a competent soldier yet he understood that his lack of experience fighting Indians might hinder operations. One of his most noted decisions with regard to the campaign was to request that LTC George Custer be allowed to return to command of the 7th Cavalry for the conduct of the campaign. Once Custer arrived at his Headquarters, Terry and Custer began to plan in earnest. They placed a request through Sheridan's headquarters asking that the balance of the 7th Cavalry be brought up from reconstruction duty in Louisiana to take part in the campaign. The request was denied. Custer would go into battle three cavalry troops short. Moreover, Custer's request through Terry to Sheridan for an additional twenty Indian scouts was also disapproved. "Despite these setbacks, on 21 February Terry was able to outline to Sheridan the plan for Custer's column, 'I think my only plan will be to give Custer a secure base well up the Yellowstone from which he can operate, at which he can find supplies, and to which he can retire at any time the Indians gather in too great a strength for the small force he will have.'³¹

It is clear from these facts that Terry and Custer did not receive the complete support and proper resources one would expect from higher headquarters. Terry, however, would offer Custer additional troops from the 2nd Cavalry and a battery of Gatling guns to augment his force. Custer declined the offer. With his characteristic ego, he maintained the whimsical notion that the 7th Cavalry could handle the whole Sioux Nation, severely hindering the conduct of the campaign and ultimately contributing to his defeat. As the commander, Terry could have ordered Custer to accept this additional combat power. His failure in not providing more explicit, simple orders and deferring to Custer's known rash judgement led directly Custer's annihilation.

As stated previously, the Indian Bureau and more specifically many of the Indian Agents who were tasked to properly manage the requisitioning of food, clothing and supplies for the reservation Indians were extremely corrupt. They would habitually short the Indians of their already substandard rations and sell them to prospectors and passing emigrants for a handsome profit. During the spring and early summer of 1876, the unscrupulous practices of a few agents led directly to the large-scale exodus of thousands of starving destitute Indians to the hostile bands in the Unceded Territories. The Army, for its part, assumed it was facing no more than 1000 Indians. They had no idea they would encounter such a large and determined enemy.

The Army of this period was severely underfunded. The quality of soldiers that were mustered out of the Army after Appomattox was almost non-existent in the 1870s. "The enlisted complement was mediocre at best. The Army offered few incentives to attract recruits of high caliber. Pay ranged from thirteen dollars a month for privates to twenty-two dollars for line sergeants. Gone were the legions of fresh young men fired by a sense of mission to save the Union. The New York Sun charged that the Army is composed of bummers, loafers, and foreign paupers. But the paper was only partially correct as the ranks also harbored criminals, and drunkards as well."³² The 7th Cavalry at the time was considered one of the Army's best regiments. However, "as Custer rode to his last battle, he was supported by a regiment not at its fighting best. Its ranks were filled with men who were headed into their first battle. Indeed forty percent of the enlisted men were in their first enlistment. The new men had very little training they were poor horsemen, and lacked basic marksmanship skills. Sergeant Ferdinand Culbertson of Company A, 7th Cavalry later testified, that some of them were not fit to take into action."³³ The manpower "Means" provided to execute the government's policy was of poor quality, ill-trained and possessed low morale by today's standards.

The American Public during the post-Civil War years was very intrigued with the western frontier and easterners, in particular, became somewhat sympathetic to the plight of the Native American. "As such the recommendations of military Division and Department commanders on general Indian policy frequently carried little weight, and civilian guidelines limited their military options."³⁴ Civilian public opinion of the Yellowstone Campaign is only documented in the aftermath of Custer's defeat. Once the news of the defeat had circulated around the country public outcry and pressure was enough to influence Congress to increase funding of the Army, expanding both the Infantry and Cavalry force structure.

Although it is true that Custer was defeated at the tactical level, it is also true that the seeds of that defeat were sewn by the operational decisions of Sheridan, Crook and Terry.

Congress and the American public were responsible for the defeat as well. Their long-term neglect of and apathy concerning the Army created a hollow under-resourced force scattered across the vast nation. The soldiers of the 7th Cavalry paid a heavy toll for the imbalance in the government's strategic policy in 1876.

DOCTRINE AND TACTICS

For almost eighty years, the primary task of United States Army had been to secure the westward expansion of America's frontier, in part through the subjugation of the native tribes in various regions of U.S. territory. Yet, "throughout the debate over size, composition, and command of the peacetime Army, apparently no one thought to ask whether a traditional organization truly fit the special conditions of the Army's mission in the west. Little if any attention was given to effectively constitute and employ the nation's military resources to subjugate and control the Indians. Despite these facts, military leaders of the day never faced up to the problem of developing a set doctrine or tactics."³⁵

The challenge to establishing any set doctrine for engaging the Indians came primarily from within the Officer Corps itself. Respected professional soldiers from the Civil War era such as General Hancock made it clear to Congress that, "Indian service of the Army entitled no weight in determining the proper strength, composition and organization of the Army."³⁶ Key leaders within the force maintained a focus on fighting a conventional European-style conflict such as the Mexican and Civil Wars. The curriculum at West Point followed suit. Young cadets were provided a thorough education that prepared them well for a conventional style war while Indian warfare and tactics were rarely discussed. Moreover, much of the Officer Corps of that period held the Native American in very low esteem. In fact, most held the opinion that the Indian was a barbarous coward as he rarely stood and fought a fixed battle and would only stand and fight if he held a superior force ratio.

The Indians themselves presented special challenges to the conventional Army. Each tribe had its own cultural standards, beliefs, warfighting styles and geographical advantages. The Apaches of the Southwest did not fight the same as the Sioux or Cheyenne of the High Plains or the Modocs of Southern Oregon and Northern California. Due to these many factors, doctrine development truly became the purview of the individual commander.

The successful commanders adapted their conventional organizations and methods to attack the weaknesses of the Native American and exploit the few advantages the Army had on the open plains, namely discipline and replaceable manpower. To overcome the superior mobility of the typical Indian band, Sherman and Sheridan did develop the effective doctrinal

concepts of winter campaigning and the use of converging columns. Indian camps were most vulnerable during the winter months due to their decreased mobility. Converging columns allowed the Army to pursue a hostile band from multiple directions and thus trap them between the columns and bring them to battle or force surrender. Commanders such as George Crook made extensive use of Indian Auxiliaries to both scout for and fight alongside his forces.

It was largely held in this period that a well-disciplined regular force of cavalry or infantry could easily fight off the prolonged attacks of a far larger Indian force. Indians rarely stood and fought and when they did their independent method of fighting rarely allowed them to attain the level of teamwork or unity of effort to overcome a better-trained U.S. force. This perception of the Indian and his fighting methods had an impact on Army tactics. Facing a superior Indian force, cavalrymen would habitually dismount their horses and deploy in a skirmish line thus bringing their controlled firepower to bear. However, any initiative the unit may have had was lost using this tactic and the Indians would normally circle the troops at a distance looking for weak points until a countercharge could be organized to drive them off.

During the Battle of the Little Big Horn, Major Marcus Reno's use of this tactic during his initial charge on the Southern end of the Sioux village spelled disaster for his command. His initial charge had indeed surprised the Indians and had started a panic in the village. Many historians and Indian witnesses, interviewed years after the battle, feel Reno had the advantage and if he had maintained the initiative he could have swept through the lower village giving Custer the time needed to bring his full force to bear and flank the village. However, Reno perceiving himself outmanned, dismounted his men well outside the village and pushed his skirmish line forward to counter the growing number of mounted warriors. Reno's decision resulted in the complete loss of initiative, gave the Sioux time to organize a counterattack on his positions and allowed the Indians to fight both forces in detail. In countless engagements of the past, this tactic had proven successful in driving off undisciplined Indian attacks. During this battle however, Reno became a victim of the wide held bias against enemy fighting capabilities and a prisoner of previous tactical successes.

The lack of a firm published doctrine and common tactics to guide the military leadership in the employment of the Army as a peace Enforcer with the native tribes had severe negative consequences for the Army and government Indian policy. As one Kansas settler would satirically observe, "Talk about regulars hunting Indians! They go out, and when night comes, they blow the bugle to let the Indians know they are going to sleep. In the morning, they blow the bugle to let the Indians know they are going to get up. Between their bugles and their great trains, they manage to keep the Indians out of sight."³⁷

Officers were trained to wage conventional war against a conventional enemy using traditional doctrine and tactics. Although Custer was able to adapt to the extremes of Indian warfare, his racial bias and previous tactical successes made him vulnerable over time, culminating in disaster during the Yellowstone Campaign. He believed his force to be invincible against any number of "cowardly" Indians, and his previous success at the Battle of the Washita as well as his exploits in the Civil War may have influenced his decision to split his forces for the final assault on the Sioux village at the Little Big Horn.

TRAINING

The combination of poor congressional support, an unstable economy and a critical lack of doctrinal guidance led not only to a hollow Army force structure, but an Army woefully untrained to execute its mission to subdue the Indians throughout the West. With such a small, inadequate force to cover so vast a territory, the Army had no choice but to disperse its cavalry and infantry along strategic lines of communication such as emigrant trails and railroad construction corridors. These small Army contingents were spread throughout hundreds of small forts and camps and because of this, units had very little opportunity or time if any to train together as a collective troop, company or regiment. The lack of proper congressional resourcing also severely affected Army retention. With a congressionally mandated pay reduction in 1871, "the Army held little appeal, it suffered from an extraordinary turnover and low moral. Each year death, desertion, and discharge claimed from twenty-five to forty percent of the enlisted force. Combined with the almost total lack of formal training, the high loss rate and low reenlistment rate kept the Army's ranks heavy with inexperience troops."³⁸ Soldier quality was also extremely poor during the period leading up to the Yellowstone Champaign. In order to attract enlistments the Army lowered qualification standards, thus mass quantities of poorly educated immigrants, thieves and undesirable drifters entered the Army's ranks. The low pay, substandard training, and sometimes-brutal discipline combined with the monotony of frontier life led to poor morale within the ranks. Custer's 7th Cavalry was no exception. As he marched to the Little Big Horn his force included over two hundred immigrants many of whom could not adequately speak English. Moreover, his regiment had the dubious distinction of having the highest desertion rate in the Army during the post-Civil War period.

The Army's training budget woes had an extremely adverse impacted at the lowest levels of the Army's already poor training program. "Due to government and Army parsimony as far as ammunition was concerned, few soldiers had much target or firing practice with live ammunition. The War Department's General Order 103, dated August 5 1874, authorized the

issuance of 10 rounds of .45 caliber ammunition per month for practice; officers were held strictly accountable.”³⁹

The lack of a thorough training program and a complete lack of focus on any Peace Enforcement efforts had an adverse impact on the ability of the Officer Corps to properly employ their troops when in contact with the Indians. In many cases, “the situation did not call for warfare but merely a policing action. That is, offending individuals or groups needed to be separated from the innocent and punished.”⁴⁰ Without the proper training however, both senior and junior officers alike almost always overreacted and responded to Indian challenges with the conventional war approach and would punish the “guilty and innocent alike.”

The complete lack of proper training during this critical period in the Army’s history is directly connected to lack of budgetary resources allocated to support the Army and its missions during that period. The Yellowstone Campaign, initiated to subdue the hostile Sioux, was executed by a undermanned, poorly trained and disciplined force, led by officers who had not been trained to appreciate the subtleties of Peace Enforcement versus warfighting. “George Armstrong Custer may have done almost everything as prescribed. But it was not enough to overcome the combination of particular circumstances, some of his own making, arrayed against him that day. Inadequate training in marksmanship, poor fire discipline and a complete break down in command and control were major factors in the battle’s costly results.”⁴¹ In the years following the Little Big Horn disaster, the government did increase budgetary resourcing and the Army did incorporate training reforms that eventually improved the professionalism of the Army.

EQUIPMENT

It is widely thought that the repeating firearms of the Winchester and Henry Repeating Arms Companies won the West. While it is true that many a civilian plainsmen, hunter and drover owned one of these fine weapons, it was not they who ultimately civilized the west. The Army of the post Civil War, short on manpower, training, proper doctrine and tactics, had to withstand the additional hardship of being ill equipped for its challenging Peace Enforcement tasks. Until 1873, the cavalry trooper in the Army had been armed with the exceptional “Allen Conversion” Springfield repeating carbine. This weapon had been proven in combat in a number of western engagements with the Indians, most notably the Wagon Box Fight outside Fort Phil Kearney during the summer of 1867. Armed with this exceptional weapon and maintaining a high and controlled rate of fire, 32 soldiers besieged in a small wagon corral held off an estimated 2500 Sioux warriors for the better part of a day until a relief column could reach

them. Despite the successes of this repeating weapon, the main firepower of the cavalry trooper, the government and "the Ordnance Department of Army decided to convert back to the use of a single shot system. A single shot system was selected instead of a repeating system because of manufacturing economy, efficient consumption of ammunition and similarity to European weapons of the time."⁴²

After an exhaustive testing period the .45 caliber Model 1873 Springfield "trap door" single shot carbine was chosen as the standard issue weapon for the cavalry. Although accurate up to 300 yards, the weapon had a serious design flaw: when fired in hot weather over a sustained period the brass ammunition casing had a tendency to jam in the breech. The only way to extract it was to pry it out. "Jammed breeches on the 1873 Springfield carbine plagued soldiers throughout the frontier Cavalry. The Army's solution was to provide one wooden cleaning rod as a pushing tool for every ten weapons in the command. Thus, a soldier would have to wait his turn to reduce a jammed casing in the midst of a firefight. Many soldiers purchased small pocket-knives to pry the stuck cartridges out."⁴³

It is ironic that both Brigadier General Terry and Major Marcus Reno served on the test and selection board for the 1873 Springfield Carbine, given that the weapon's performance on that hot summer day in June of 1876 would fail the 7th Cavalry in the ultimate test of combat. Moreover, until late in 1875 government Indian Agents and commercial traders made a regular habit of selling new repeating arms to the Sioux and Cheyenne so they could continue to hunt. Their weapons included both the Henry and Winchester repeating rifles. Again, because of an improper emphasis on the "Means," an ineffective main weapon system to support the "Ways" and "Ends" of the government, along with poor policy decisions within the Indian Bureau, the Army was hamstrung before the campaign was conceived. Lack of adequate congressional appropriations to fund the Army with an effective carbine with sufficient ammunition procurement to conduct proper training had a disastrous impact on the soldiers of the 7th Cavalry and contributed to the failure of the overall campaign.

OPERATIONAL PLANNING OF THE EXPEDITION

There are many axioms that guide the military leader in both his preparation and execution of a battle plan. Perhaps none are more important than the "Principles of War" that help a commander focus on the Objective; the Offensive; Mass troops and effects; employing Economy of Force; using proper Maneuver; maintaining Unity of Command; implementing proper Security; achieving Surprise over the enemy; and, ensuring Simplicity in the plan. During the planning of any military operation such as the Yellowstone Campaign, it is essential that as

many of these key Principles of War be considered and incorporated into the strategic and operational planning. However, during the planning and execution of the Yellowstone Campaign, General Sheridan, Brigadier General Crook, and Brigadier General Terry, the key operational leaders of the campaign, violated three critical principles.

Although Sheridan's plan to subdue the Sioux using converging columns was an excellent tactic and had worked in the past, his failure to designate a commander for the overall planning and execution of campaign broke the fundamental rule of Unity of Command. General Sherman would later comment that the failure of the campaign was due more to the failure of the Army's senior leadership to establish Unity of Command as opposed the performance of any of the tactical commanders.

Brigadier General Crook a brilliant Offensive minded Indian fighter in previous campaigns against the Utes in Idaho and the Apache in the Southwest, was unable to bring about a similar result against the powerful Sioux. His plan to push north against the Sioux in the Unceded Territory with a large mobile force was well conceived. However, twice in the campaign, his forces engaged large bodies of Indians only to be forced back to their supply trains. Crook with his large force of over 1200 men was able to gain the early initiative. However, his decision to pull his force back after the Rosebud fight to refit, broke the tenet of maintaining the Offensive spirit and severely hampered the campaign's central precept of converging columns.

Brigadier General Terry's initial plan to move west pushing the Sioux toward the Big Horn River and into the path of Colonel Gibbon's column moving east or Crook's column moving north was a simple straightforward plan. However, once Indian signs were reported and a final assault plan conceived, Terry, knowing Lieutenant Colonel Custer was prone to rash judgement, failed to provide his subordinate with clear and concise orders that may have better influenced Custer's decisions. Terry's instructions to Custer specifically state that he should use his "Best Judgement" in the pursuit of the hostile Indians. With this statement, "Terry authorized Custer to act as the sole judge,"⁴⁴ of his actions once contact with the Indians is made.

Sheridan, Crook and Terry were successful commanders During the Civil War. It was by following the basic principles of war, that all three Generals garnered success in previous campaigns. Yet, in this one campaign the failure to follow these basic rules combined with a lack of a central doctrine to guide the leadership, a lack of tough, realistic training and proper equipment, and units critically understrength facilitated one of the Army's greatest operational disasters.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PRESENT DAY PEACE ENFORCEMENT OPERATIONS

So much has changed over the past one hundred and twenty-five years since Custer and the 7th Cavalry met their fate on the bluffs above the Little Big Horn. The Army has grown into a large, mechanized, well-trained institution. It has successfully fought both conventional wars and been involved in multiple Peace Operations. Yet, after looking back at the Yellowstone Campaign as a type of peace enforcing operation, it is clear that there are key lessons from our history that can be applied to today's modern Peace Enforcement Operations.

As a major Peace Enforcement Operation, the Yellowstone Campaign demonstrates the need to initiate such operations with the overwhelming presence necessary to insure that the antagonist has no option but to submit without a fight.

The proper and well-balanced application of the Principles of War must be incorporated into all planning and execution of future peace operations. The force must be able to,

Identify and pursue clearly defined and attainable goals, whose seize and retain the initiative, keeping adversaries off balance. The force must have a single unity of effort and one overall commander for the operation. The forces used must have focus. They must be able to concentrate the elements of their power at the proper time and place to best meet the primary objective of the operation. Economy of force must be utilized as much as possible by allocating the minimal essential resource to complete the mission. The operation must be well orchestrated through the application of resources at the times, places and in the ways that will best accomplish the mission. The force must be provided with very clear operational plans and strategies that do not exceed the abilities of the organization that must implement them. Most importantly, the force must maintain constant security. They must minimize the vulnerability of strategic plans, activities, relationships and soldiers to the manipulation and interference by opponents.⁴⁵

In order to increase the chance of success in future peace operations, the proper forces should be deployed early to establish control and head off any challenges from the opposition. Had the Yellowstone Campaign been executed earlier, in the winter, as Sheridan desired, the Campaign would have had a much more positive outcome for both the Indians and the Army.

In the years leading up to the Yellowstone Campaign the Army had lost the mission to oversee the daily operations on the Indian Agencies. Not only had civilian control of the reservation system opened the door to corruption but the Army eventually lost direct oversight and contact with the Indians. The result was a loss of trust and heightened frustration on both sides that only increased the likelihood of hostilities. In the conduct of future Peace Operations, it is incumbent that U.S. soldiers maintain constant presence and contact with the population. This presence promotes stability and a sense of security among the general population and a feeling of trust in the U.S. soldiers and our mission in their country.

Unlike the Army during the Yellowstone Campaign with virtually no established doctrine for guidance, the Army and the military establishment of today has begun to write very clear and concise doctrine, which will guide commanders as they plan and conduct Peacekeeping related Operations around the world. This doctrine includes the Army's Field Manuals 100-23, Peace Operations and FM 100-23-1, Multiservice Procedures For Humanitarian Assistance Operations, and Joint Pub 3-07, Joint Doctrine for Military Operations Other Than War. In addition, the National Command Authorities provide clear, concise guidance in the Nation's National Military Strategy regarding the criteria for where, when and to what extent the United States will commit forces to support Peace Operations. However, as world events continue to evolve and Peace Operations become more complicated it will be incumbent on the Army's leadership to insure that our doctrine on conducting them keeps pace with those changes.

In those years prior to the Yellowstone Campaign, the Army had no formal training program to prepare its units for the type of Peace Enforcement operations it would conduct in the West. Neither the Officer Corps nor the enlisted men could understand or appreciate the significance of the cultural differences between whites and Indians. Had there been formal training in this area many misunderstandings that eventually led to hostilities could have been avoided. The Army of today must insure that troops deploying to specific areas around the world have a basic understanding of the people and culture they will protect. This type of training will facilitate greater trust and understanding from the outset and decrease the likelihood of hostilities.

One of the positive lessons from the Army's Peace Enforcement Operations with the Indians was the creation of the Indian Reservation Police. This native police force was established to resolve conflicts on the reservation with men who knew and understood the culture and language of the people. The Indian Police for the most part were very successful in this task and are still in existence today on reservations. In future Peace Operations, the army must quickly establish a Civil Police authority to insure and maintain impartiality in civil conflict resolution.

In the years after the Civil War, Army force structure was severely cut and those units left to conduct the various operations and missions around the nation were far too few. If the United States is to keep up the current pace of deploying troops to various crisis areas around the world we will need more soldiers to do the job. The increased dependence on Army and Air Force reserve components to conduct these missions validates the need for increased active force structure. Moreover, I would argue that the Army increase the number of Military Police

battalions to deploy to future Peace Operations as they have the proper equipment and focused training to better execute them in both urban and rural areas.

CONCLUSIONS

In the course this paper I have conducted a critical analysis of the post Civil War Army's conduct of the Yellowstone Campaign as a Peace Enforcement Operation. The evidence presented clearly demonstrates that the 1876 Yellowstone Campaign against the Sioux was jeopardized at the strategic level, prior to any one of the three columns commencing operations in the field against the Sioux and Cheyenne. I have presented the strategic level factors which I believe led to the disaster. The analysis presented, shows that the Army's ability to support the government's policy "Ends" was severely crippled given the "Ways" and "Means" available at that time in history. The Congress, indifferent to the Army and the resources it needed, did not provide the appropriate funding for adequate training, manning or equipping of the forces sent to execute an ill-conceived government policy. The critical balance between a clearly defined end state, a well coordinated plan to meet that end state, based on the sound Principles of War and the means available, an Army large enough and thoroughly trained and equipped to execute the plan, did not exist. With these weaknesses working against it at the strategic, operational and tactical levels; and confronted with a determined foe that was fighting for its very survival, the Army was soundly defeated. However, in the aftermath of this great disaster, the Army and the Congress learned some valuable lessons. Congress to its credit did increase both the authorizations for increased force structure and budgetary resourcing and in the end the Sioux and Cheyenne were forced back onto their respective reservations. The proud warrior horse culture two hundred years in the making was eventually defeated by a policy of brute force not by a well balanced military strategy.

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ENDNOTES

¹ Colonel Larry M. Forster, "Peace Operations: An Update, War, National Strategy and Policy, Core Curriculum Course 2, Department of National Security and Strategy (Carlisle, PA: United States Army War College, 2000), 83.

² Joints Chiefs of Staff. Joint Pub 3-07, Joint Doctrine for Military Operations Other Than War, (Washington D.C.: The Pentagon, June 1995), GL-4.

³ Ibid., GL-4.

⁴ Russel F. Weigley, The American Way Of War, A History Of United States Military Strategy And Policy (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1973), 154.

⁵ Ibid., 154.

⁶ Robert M. Utley, Frontier Regulars, The Unites States Army and The Indians, 1866-1891 (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1973), 99.

⁷ Weigley, 158.

⁸ Ibid., 159.

⁹ Ibid., 161.

¹⁰ Utley, 247.

¹¹ Ibid., 248-249.

¹² Weigley, 153.

¹³ Francis Paul Prucha, Documents of United States Indian Policy (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1975). 53.

¹⁴ James J. Cassidy Jr., Through Indian Eyes (Readers Digest General Books, 1995). 309-310.

¹⁵ Donald McCaig, "The Bozeman Trail," Smithsonian Magazine (October 2000): 92.

¹⁶ Ibid., 92.

¹⁷ Robert Wooster. The Military and United States Indian Policy, 1865-1903 (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1988), 14.

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¹⁹ Ibid., 39-40.

²⁰ Weigley, 159.

²¹ Wooster, 77-78.

²² Ibid., 77.

²³ John S. Gray, Centennial Campaign, The Sioux War of 1876 (Norman: University Of Oklahoma Press, 1988), 23.

²⁴ Utley, 15.

²⁵ Ibid., 61.

²⁶ Ibid., 16.

²⁷ Wooster, 56-57.

²⁸ Utley, 15.

²⁹ Phillip H. Sheridan, LTG, Headquarters Military Division of the Missouri, Order from Sheridan to Crook to commence his portion of the 1876 Campaign against the Sioux (Washington D.C.: The National Archives, February, 1876)

³⁰ Wooster, 64.

³¹ Gray, 40.

³² Utley, 22.

³³ Jerry L. Russell, Jerry, 1876 Facts About Custer and the Battle of the Little Big Horn (Mason City: Savas Publishing Company, 1999), 79.

³⁴ Wooster, 25.

³⁵ Utley, 35-36.

³⁶ Ibid., 45.

³⁷ Wooster, 247.

³⁸ Utley, 23.

³⁹ Russell, 99.

⁴⁰ Utley, 55.

⁴¹ Greg Michno, "Guns of the Little Big Horn", "Wild West" (June 1998): 80.

⁴² Ibid., 30.

⁴³ Russell, 101.

⁴⁴ Gray, 148.

⁴⁵ William T. Johnson, et al., The Principles of War in the 21st Century: Strategic Considerations (Carlisle, PA: U.S. Army War College, 1995), 4-24.

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